

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# GODLY ESTEEM

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He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.

—Isaiah 53:3–5

Only the Scriptures are adequate to speak to the innermost needs of a human soul. Fallen humanity wastes away with a terminal spiritual disease. The rebellion of Adam in the Garden of Eden infected the entire human race with a corrupt nature and sickened souls. A mortal disease called sin grips every lost person. Many try to cover their guilt and shame with fig leaves of self-justification. Others look for relief in the futility of seeking redemption through good works. Still others misplace their trust in the tenants of humanism. But sin and all of its disgrace can only

be removed when we experience God's love as the blood of Jesus washes our sins away.<sup>a</sup>

The plight of human inferiority came through the fall. When Adam and Eve rebelled, sin alienated them from God. When they were expelled from the garden, the Maker's ultimate purpose for the crowning achievement of His creation was aborted. Sin separates all sinners from God.<sup>b</sup> When Adam and Eve fell, they immediately became inferior. Banished from the garden, they forfeited their greatest privilege of communing with God. Humankind was created in God's image and destined to dwell in the presence of God.

The disfigurement of sin makes every soul inferior. Jesus paid the price to redeem our true esteem two thousand years ago when "He was despised, and we did not esteem Him ... we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted" (Isa. 53:3–4). The Son of God was humiliated to restore true dignity to humanity. Through His complete rejection, sacrificial love secured our absolute acceptance.

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

—Ephesians 3:14–19

Godly esteem can only be found in Jesus. Whether it is acknowledged or not, inferiority grips everyone until acceptance is found in the redeeming love of God. Sin makes every sinner inferior.

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<sup>a</sup> 1 John 1:5–9

<sup>b</sup> Isaiah 59:1–2

In the Scripture above, Paul prayed that Christ would dwell in our hearts by faith so we would become rooted and grounded in love. God's love surpasses mere knowledge. We can only comprehend the dimensions of God's fatherly affections as we experience them. God's love for each of us is so great that His desire is to fill us with His own fullness! It is tragic when our life is spent pursuing anything less.

Sin humiliated humanity. If we humble ourselves in repentance, God's grace will exalt us! We are only vessels of clay, but with God's indwelling presence, we contain a treasure of infinite value. God is completely full. He has absolutely everything and lacks absolutely nothing. His children are called to be partakers of His fullness! "And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). Anyone who is filled with God has had every chain broken that shackles souls to inferiority! Jesus came to liberate our souls from the captivity of sin and the scars sin has left on our souls.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

—Luke 4:18–19

Secularism rejects the realities of the human predicament and God's solution revealed in the cross of Jesus. Without a living faith in the living God, people look within themselves for answers and relief. Some misplace faith in the human spirit as a viable solution to the human dilemma. Others seek to fill their innate need for God with the fleeting pleasures of sin. Multitudes strive to fill the emptiness in their souls by accumulating material things. All the riches in this world could not replace the treasure Adam ceded in the fall.

The gratification of desire and the pursuit of knowledge, fame, or fortune can provide fleeting happiness and temporary fulfillment. But only a life lived in pursuit of God can fill the deepest longings of the human spirit. It is tragic when human beings who were created for intimacy with God let created things become the focus of their lives. No earthly fortune could ever compare to the riches found when God is your treasure.<sup>a</sup>

“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27). Although people were created in God’s image, that image was marred when sin corrupted the soul. “So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men” (Isaiah 52:14). The sufferings of Jesus were so pitiless that He was disfigured more than any man. “He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him . . . And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him” (Isa. 53:2–3). The image of Jesus was so dehumanized with the repugnance of our sins and the physical butchery He endured that people turned in disgust and hid their faces from Him.

The grace to restore God’s image in redeemed souls began when the godliness of the sinless Lamb gave way to the sum of humanity’s wickedness. His desecration initiated the restoration of our honor. His glorious image was mutilated to restore God’s image in humanity that was mutilated in the fall. Only the redeemed can experience the renewal of God’s image within them. “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29).

Before the fall in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve both bore God’s image. “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”

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<sup>a</sup> Matthew 5:6

(Gen. 1:27). Self-image is what a person thinks he is. What we were originally created for and redeemed to have is God's image.

Many benighted preachers are devoted to building up people's self-image. Gospel preaching recreates people into God's image. The difference between these two concepts could not be any greater. They are contradictory, not complimentary. Improving self-image deals with propping up our fallen human nature. The gospel rescues us from our fallen condition, gives us eternal life, and imparts our Father's divine nature.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

—2 Peter 1:2–4

Building up a person's fallen human nature through philosophy is a fatal substitute for the impartation of the divine nature through the gospel.

The Scriptures are clear. Every unconverted human being lives a life of inferiority. So do many Christians. The truth is that anything in us unlike God leaves us inferior. If you live a life of spiritual mediocrity, you are inferior, because you are content with being less than God destined. When you compromise with sin, guilt overwhelms grace as condemnation grips your heart. Sin makes you inferior, because it tarnishes your soul and distorts the image of God in you.

Multitudes of believers live lives of inferiority, because worldly diversions, temporal pursuits, and compromise with sin distract them from abundant life in the perfect will of God. "I beseech

you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:1–2). A life lived in pursuit of God’s will is a life well spent. Pursuing anything less will leave us spiritually inferior!

“And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man” (1 Cor. 15:49). Improving self-image is a deadly alternative to bearing God’s image. When we are saved, God does not repair us. He resurrects us. He does not mend our old lives; He crucifies them! When we repent, we should live in the light that our old lives of sin were nailed to His cross. “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with” (Rom. 6:6).

When we become children of God, we are born again and begin to bear the image of our heavenly Father. The old, fallen sinner passes away at the altar, and the new, godly image begins to emerge! “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Many prominent preachers focus on repairing people’s self-esteem. The audiences may applaud, but the heavens are appalled! Motivational speeches build up self-image, but only the gospel can recreate people in God’s image. People’s real need is not an improved self-perception. Rather than being happy with themselves, people need to be rescued from themselves! Nothing in this world compares to being delivered from our fallen nature as we begin to bear the image of God!

What all of Adam’s descendants really need is God’s image restored in them. God have mercy on every preacher of self-esteem

who chooses to encourage but does not rescue the lost sons and daughters of Adam. “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Should any church leader be content seeking anything else?

*Sinless Lamb of God,  
Without a spot or stain,  
Smitten on a cross,  
For sinners sin became.*

*Pierced for love of man,  
Creator crucified. Eternal are the scars,  
His back, brow, feet, hands, side.*

*Throughout eternity,  
The blood-washed shall proclaim  
The wonders of redeeming love,  
Lovely, lovely name.*

*Lovely, lovely name,  
Jesus, name I love.  
Your name's above all names,  
Lovely, lovely name.*